



16 Days of ACTIVISM



**BROTHERS
FOR LIFE**

Taking A Stand Against Gender Based Violence

THE PATRICK SHAI STORY

Actor Patrick Shai repeatedly witnessed his stepfather brutally beat his mum.

She bravely never cried out while she was being beaten.

This was to have a big effect on his life and on his own family one day.

"I used to believe that my stepfather didn't do a good job because my mum didn't scream," he said at the launch of the Brothers Against Violence campaign, an initiative by Brothers for Life to address gender-based violence, for which he is an ambassador.

In a hard-hitting new TV public service announcement for Brothers Against Violence, Shai steps into the light and speaks honestly and courageously about his past as a violent husband and father.

In the announcement, shot in harsh-looking black-and-white, he says: "I used to beat up my wife.

"I beat her up for my own infidelities.

"I beat her up for my own insecurities.

"I would say: 'I want to beat you so hard that you scream; that you cry louder than my mum.

"I wanted her to love me. But how can you say that someone loves you when they are afraid of you? "That's when I realised I needed to change. Enough was enough. It was not about what anybody else said, it was about me. And with me it had to stop."

Speaking at the Brothers Against Violence launch function in Sandton on 20 October – attended by Health Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi and the then-Minister of Women, Children and Persons With Disabilities, Noluthando Mayende-Sibiya – Shai told the stunned audience that these days he was willing to speak about "what I call my footprints of violence".

One such footprint is watching the beatings given to his mother, which he took into his relationships with women and, eventually, his marriage.

Another is the memory of his son pleading with him not to kill his mother – a son who is today a drug addict, which Shai knows is a result of the abuse he inflicted upon his family.

"It's not an easy thing to talk about," he said, as he paid tribute to women and children who have been – and continue to be – victims of violence and, most importantly, his wife for giving him a second chance.

After years of assaulting his wife, and exposing his daughter and two sons to violence, Shai's "Damascus experience" came when he played a wife-beater on the TV drama *Soul City*. He was filming a domestic violence scene . . .

"When 'action' was called, I saw not the set but my own house and my own family," Shai told the audience.

"For the first time, I saw the pain I was dishing out to my wife. For the first time, I heard the pleas of my son and I saw the pain on the face of my wife.

"It was very

strange."

Shai called "cut" himself and walked off the set. "I knew then that I needed to change," he said.

When he arrived at his house later that day he confessed his experience to his wife. He offered her freedom by moving himself out of their house and giving her a divorce.

"My wife said, 'come inside the house; it's good you feel this way,'" said Shai, adding that his wife had pledged to be there for him.

"Against all popular belief that men cannot change, the very woman I had hurt believed that I meant it – that I could change," he said.

Being violent to one's family resulted in great losses, some of which could never be repaid, said Shai: "You will be lucky if you still have your children with you. You will be lucky if you are still regarded as a father by your kids."

His daughter and one of his sons "are still with me", he said, but his other son "had looked for another father" and found it in drug addiction. It was a constant struggle to try and win his son back, who is currently in hiding because he owes a druglord money. "I feel that I drove him there," he said.

But Shai says he enjoys "the joys of change". It was a wonderful experience when he was the first one his daughter told of her first period – and "if I had been the abusive father, she would not have told me".

Similarly, his other son had felt the same freedom to tell him that he wanted to pursue a career in music, and they had explored this together.

The biggest change, perhaps, came for his wife. He confessed that as someone who never finished his schooling, he would previously have felt threatened by her desire to better herself. Since his rehabilitation, "my wife went out and studied, and realised her full potential. She is doing her Masters degree today".

He is clearly at peace with himself now and feels "humbled" to be a Brothers for Life ambassador.



Patrick Shai, a Brothers for Life ambassador, discussed his personal connection to abuse.

What is the 16 days of activism campaign?

SOUTH AFRICA continues to be plagued by unacceptably high levels of violence against women and children . . .

And this is in spite of our constitution and progressive legislation that protects the rights of women and children.

Rape, gender-based violence, child sexual abuse and violence against children are problems that cut across all levels of our society, and dominate headlines around the country on a daily basis.

From today to 10 December, South Africa will join more than 150 countries participating in the global 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence campaign.

But in this country, the campaign highlights the violence committed against women and also includes fighting all forms of abuse against children.

The 16 Days of Activism campaign was first launched in 1991 by Rutgers University's Centre for Women's Global Leadership as an annual campaign to demand the elimination of all forms of violence against women.

It includes significant dates, like:

- ★ **25 November** – International Day for Elimination of Violence against Women.
- ★ **29 November** – International Women Human Rights Defenders Day.
- ★ **1 December** – World Aids Day.
- ★ **5 December** – International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development.
- ★ **6 December** – Anniversary of Montreal Massacre in Canada, now their National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.
- ★ **10 December** – International Human Rights Day and the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This supplement has been brought to you by Brothers for Life which is a collaborative effort led by South African National AIDS Council Men's Sector (SANAC), the Department of Health, USAID/PEPFAR, Johns Hopkins Health and Education in South Africa (JHESA), Sonke Gender Justice, UNICEF and more than 40 other civil society partners working in the field of HIV prevention and health.

What you can do . . .

What can you do to support the 16 Days of Activism campaign?

- ★ Wear a white ribbon – the symbol of peace as a personal commitment to never be the cause of or accept violence against women and children.
- ★ Speak out against woman and child abuse.
- ★ Encourage silent survivors to challenge abusers.
- ★ Report child abuse to the police.
- ★ Volunteer time in support of a non-governmental organisation or community group to help abused women and children.
- ★ Participate in 16 Days of Activism activities.
- ★ Join your local community policing forum.
- ★ Donate money to organisations that assist the victims of violence and abuse.

Ultimately, the fight against violence against women and children can only be won if all South Africans join forces to address this problem. . .